

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 27, 2005

The Honorable Cameron R. Hume
Acting Inspector General
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Room 8100
Washington, DC 20522-0308

Dear Mr. Hume:

We are writing to request that the State Department Inspector General's office investigate and report to Congress on the Department's compliance with a series of recommendations your office made last year in response to faulty terrorism data included in the annual *Patterns of Global Terrorism* report. We also ask that you determine whether political considerations affected the Department's decision this year to withhold data regarding terrorist attacks from its annual terrorism report.

We understand that Rep. Henry Waxman submitted a similar request to you on April 21, 2005. Since that request, congressional staff received a briefing on the Department's actions from Karen Aguilar, the Acting Coordinator for Counterterrorism at the State Department. Based on information she provided at that briefing, we fully support Rep. Waxman's request and urge you to investigate these matters thoroughly.

Last Year's Inspector General Report

As you know, last year's *Patterns of Global Terrorism* report incorrectly asserted that 2003 had "the lowest annual total of international terrorist attacks since 1969."¹ This led Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage to claim that the report was "clear evidence that we are prevailing in the fight" against terror.² Subsequent analyses revealed that the opposite was true: significant terrorism attacks actually reached a 20-year high in 2003.³

¹ U.S. Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism — 2003* (Revised June 2004).

² U.S. Department of State, *Statement of Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage upon Release of the 2003 "Patterns of Global Terrorism" Annual Report* (Apr. 29, 2003). See also Letter from Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative Affairs to Members of Congress (Apr. 29, 2004) (stating that the 2003 terrorism data was "an indication of the great progress that has been made in fighting terrorism").

³ Letter from Rep. Henry A. Waxman to Secretary of State Colin L. Powell (May 17, 2004). See also Professors Alan B. Krueger and David Laitin, *Faulty Terror Report Card*, *Washington Post* (May 17, 2004).

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In September, your office issued a report confirming the flaws in the Department's 2003 terrorism report.⁴ Your office's investigation concluded that State Department officials used incorrect figures "to bolster the assertion that the Administration was winning the global war on terrorism."⁵

The primary thrust of your office's report was that data on international terrorist attacks must be accurate, and it must be integrated much earlier into the process of drafting the report in order to inform the Administration's policies on counterterrorism. As your office concluded, "The accuracy of the report is dependent on accurate and complete data."⁶

As a result of your investigation, your office made four concrete recommendations designed to avoid similar problems with terrorism data in the future. We have serious concerns about the Department's compliance with all four recommendations.

Recommendation to Conclude an MOU

The top recommendation made by your office was for the State Department to conclude a "memorandum of understanding" to handle terrorism data from agencies outside the State Department.⁷ As part of this recommendation, your office urged Administration officials to "keep complete minutes of meetings and notes on how decisions were made, and that they make this information available to the Department and others upon request, as appropriate."⁸

Last year, the State Department concurred with this recommendation, claiming that it had already "reviewed the clearance and approval procedures" and "prepared a draft MOU."⁹ At Monday's briefing, however, Ms. Aguilar, the Acting Coordinator for Counterterrorism, informed congressional staff that the MOU had not been concluded in the seven months since the IG report was issued.

Recommendation to Distribute Terrorism Data More Frequently

Last year, your office also recommended that international terrorism data should be submitted "for review and circulation within the Department ... at a minimum on a quarterly

⁴ Office of Inspector General, U.S. Department of State, *Review of the Department's Patterns of Global Terrorism — 2003 Report* (Sept. 2004) (SIO-S-04-18).

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

basis.”¹⁰ One purpose of this recommendation was to ensure that international terrorist data was “vetted throughout the Department by such bureaus as INR [Intelligence and Research], the Bureau of Consular Affairs, and the Bureau of Diplomatic Security, all of which have independent sources of information on terrorist events.”¹¹

This recommendation also had another critical purpose: to enhance and inform the work of State Department officials charged with discerning patterns and trends in global terrorism. As your office concluded, “Analyzing patterns of terrorism requires a reliable, periodic chronology of significant events that can be compared and examined in context, along with information from other sources.”¹²

In response to these recommendations, Administration officials stated last year that “the chronology can be produced more frequently” and that they would, “in the future, produce a quarterly chronology.”¹³

However, Ms. Aguilar informed congressional staff on Monday that in fact no international terrorism data was circulated within the State Department on a quarterly basis, as recommended. She also stated that State Department officials writing various sections of the report did not rely “predominantly” on international terrorism data, and that their failure to review such data would have no adverse impact on the substance of the report or the effectiveness of the Administration’s counterterrorism policies.

Recommendation to Increase State Department Oversight and Staffing

Your office also recommended more constant and increased State Department oversight for the annual terrorism report. Part of the problem with the 2003 report, according to your office, was that “personnel change and staffing shortages within the office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism (S/CT) likely affected oversight of the report.” As your office observed:

Management of the preparation of a report as important as *Patterns* should include oversight of the entire publication by a knowledgeable person who has responsibility for the accuracy of the data analysis presented, the consistency of data presented in different sections of the report, and the cohesiveness of the entire report.¹⁴

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*

Your office concluded that, “given the importance of the global war on terrorism to U.S. national interests and foreign policy, *Patterns* should have the appropriate support and staff needed to produce a world-class product.”¹⁵ To this end, your office recommended that the Coordinator for Counterterrorism establish both a “Public Diplomacy unit chief position” and “a second public affairs officer position.”¹⁶

At Monday’s briefing, Ms. Aguilar mentioned that the State Department had made additional staff hires. However, we remain concerned about the high rate of leadership turnover within the Counterterrorism Office. Cofer Black, the official who served as Coordinator for Counterterrorism when last year’s erroneous report was published, left the Department in October. He was replaced on November 15, 2004, by William P. Pope, who served as Acting Coordinator for Counterterrorism.¹⁷ Mr. Pope was then replaced four months later by Ms. Aguilar, who has served in an “acting” capacity since March 14, 2005.¹⁸

Recommendation to Include “More Information” About Terrorism Data

Finally, your office recommended that the Department include in the annual terrorism report additional information about the “authorship and accountability for the charts, graphs, and lists of events” generated from the international terrorism data, including information about agencies other than the State Department that contributed to the report. In response, the Department agreed last year “to include more information in the report,” including “how possible incidents are identified, processed and adjudicated,” as well as information about “international versus domestic terrorism” and “significant versus non-significant events.”¹⁹

Ms. Aguilar informed congressional staff on Monday, however, that complying with this recommendation has become unnecessary because the Department has decided to go in the opposite direction, omitting from the report all references to international terrorism data. In other words, rather than providing more information on the source of the data, as promised, the Department chose to eliminate the data itself.

Conclusion

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Biography: William P. Pope* (Nov. 15, 2004) (online at <http://www.state.gov/>).

¹⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Biography: Karen Aguilar* (Mar. 14, 2005) (online at <http://www.state.gov/>).

¹⁹ Office of Inspector General, *supra* note 4.

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Last year, your office concluded that "all parties involved" in promoting faulty terrorism data were "taking effective steps to ensure that future reports contain the most complete and accurate depiction possible of international terrorism."²⁰ At Monday's briefing for congressional staff, Ms. Aguilar stated that "the IG has reviewed all of our progress and signed off on all of our actions." Based on the information detailed above, we find Ms. Aguilar's statement difficult to believe. We ask that you investigate these issues and provide us with a report on the causes behind the Department's failure to fully comply with the recommendations made by your office.

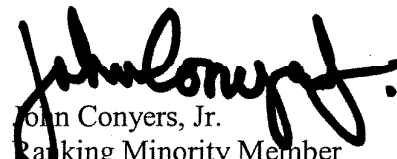
In addition, as mentioned in Rep. Waxman's April 21, 2005, request letter, there are significant concerns about whether political considerations affected the decision to withhold international terrorism data from the Department's annual report on global terrorism. Based on Monday's briefing, for example, it appears that State Department officials first considered withholding international terrorism only after the 2004 data was circulated. As we also learned at Monday's briefing, this data indicated that significant international terrorist attacks increased last year to approximately 650, more than tripling the previous year's 20-year high.

We do not believe it is necessary to restate the specific questions posed in Rep. Waxman's April 21 letter, but we believe they are meritorious and deserve a full investigation and response.


Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,


Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader


John Conyers, Jr.
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on the Judiciary


Tom Lantos
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on International Relations


Bennie G. Thompson
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Homeland Security

²⁰ *Id.*